**EAHR 811 Response – Chapters 1 and 2**

**SQ3R Technique**

As I began to survey and question chapter one, I generated several questions for myself. My main questions were what is what is the purpose of evaluation from the role of a professional evaluator, what is the importance of evaluation, and what are the limitations of evaluation? As I read through chapter two, I also noted one important question focused on what are the recent trends influencing program evaluation. As I actively read through the chapters, I began to find the answers to my questions.

**What is Purpose of Evaluation from the Role of Professional Evaluator?**

Based on this week’s and last week’s readings, there is no agreed upon definition for evaluation. Based on my original understanding, evaluation is focused on creating judgements about the value of what is being evaluated. The value judgements are used in various ways, but the central purpose or goal of the evaluation always stems back to determining the merit or worth of something.

The following table outlines the viewpoints of various professional evaluators discussed in chapter one, their viewpoints have greatly sparked my interest and I am intrigued to find out how future chapters expand on these variances and curious to know if and how my understanding of program evaluation will change throughout the course.

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| **Professional Evaluator** | **Definition/Goal of Evaluation** |
| Scriven (1967) | evaluation plays many roles, but has a single goal: to determine the worth or merit of whatever is evaluated  evaluation is concerned with significance, not only merit and worth |
| Talmage (1982) | three purposes appear most frequently in definitions of evaluation   1. Judgements on the worth of a program 2. To assist decision makers responsible for deciding policy 3. To serve a political function |
| Rallis and Rossman (2000) | purpose of evaluation is learning, helping practitioners and others to better understand and interpret their observations |
| Weiss (1998b) and Henry (2000) | purpose is to bring about social betterment |
| Chelimsky (1997) | takes a global perspective – reflecting on worldwide challenges rant than only domestic ones |
| House and Howe (1999) | goal is to foster deliberative democracy – calls on the evaluator to work with less powerful stakeholders in a democratic fashion |
| Mark, Henry, and Julnes (1999) | four different purposes: assessment of merit and worth, oversight and compliance, program and organizational improvement, and knowledge development. |

**What is the Importance of Evaluation?**

The importance of evaluation is really the most pressing question I have of this entire course. I understand the purpose and intent, but I always question whether or not we place too much emphasis on evaluation and the results created. Based on the readings in chapter one, Scriven argues the importance of evaluation to be pragmatic, ethical, social, business, intellectual and personal. Through these descriptions, I can see how evaluation is a tool of justice, how it directs effort where it is needed, how it refines tools of thought, and how it provides the basis for justifiable self-esteem. Unfortunately, I still really question the degree of value and hope that as the course continues I will be able to better satisfy this question.

**What are the Limitations of Evaluation?**

The biggest limitation noted and the one I really agree with is that evaluators promise results that are not attainable. It is also well noted that many evaluation studies fail to lead to significant improvements. Although, the chapter indicates that evaluation can be useful, it is counterproductive to be proposed as the ultimate solution.

**What are the Recent Trends Influencing Program Evaluation?**

This section of the textbook I also found interesting. I am very intrigued by emerging trends versus historical information. I believe that understanding these trends and becoming more aware will assist me in my struggle of questioning the emphasis placed on evaluation. Of the twelve trends, I found the following trends to be the most interesting:

1. Increasing concern over ethical issues
2. Increased use of evaluation in the nonprofit sector
3. Increased education and involvement of stakeholders
4. Advances in technology available to evaluators
5. Performance measurement in the government and nonprofits

As the course advances and we work together in our groups, I would like the opportunity to research these areas more in-depth and determine how they are impacting my profession as I work in the government, profit, and nonprofit industries all at once.

**PART II – Personal Response**

In inquiring about my question of whether or not too much emphasis is being placed on evaluation. I really sat back and began to analyze the information and knowledge I have acquired with respect to program evaluation. I went back to the working definition and derived that program evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information to determine the quality of a given program's design, implementation, or effectiveness, with the intent of using that analysis to improve program performance. Measuring how much activity is taking place, how quickly it is occurring, and the quality with which it is being accomplished is a critical function of the evaluator. All organizational levels must routinely monitor process performance along with output to accurately identify strengths and weaknesses affecting overall program performance. This is accomplished by establishing an evaluation plan for each program component.

When determining program effectiveness, outcome indicators need to be considered. Outcome indicators should be used to assess a program's effectiveness, identify strengths, and identify areas that may need improvement. However, they cannot explain why a problem is occurring. Operational plans should not be revised on the basis of the outcome evaluations alone. Placing too much emphasis on outcome indicators runs the risk of creating an environment where the indicator becomes a goal in and of itself, resulting in pressure to achieve an ideal number rather than focusing on process performance or the overall program goals. Program goals that were developed in the strategic planning process should always be kept in mind when analyzing outcome indicators.

Based on the research, evaluations should always be incorporated from the beginning of the planning stages for all program activities. Evaluation plans should clearly relate to objectives, methods employed to accomplish them, procedures for gathering and analyzing outcome and process performance information, and instruments, time lines, and frequencies for reporting to each level of program management. I believe it is placing this emphasis at the forefront of any program that creates these pressure issues and creates an evaluation result that does not meet or achieve the overall program goals.

**References**

Fitzpatrick, J.L., Sanders, J.R., & Worthern, B.R. (2004). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines.* Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.